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Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

Written statement* submitted by the Liberal International (World Liberal Union), a non-governmental organization in general consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[25 May 2015]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Deterioration of the State of Political and Civil Rights Around the World

Liberal International (LI) welcomes the latest initiative of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, His Excellency Juan Mendez, calling for the adoption of the revised Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, proposed as the "Mandela Rules," and reiterates its full support to the implementation of his mandate.

This statement would like to pay particular attention to the recent intensification of the persecution and prosecution of pro-democracy activists and political and civil rights defenders in the following countries:

Azerbaijan:

-Noting that allegations of 'drug abuse,' 'illegal entrepreneurship' and 'tax evasion' have become a penal instrument commonly used for putting political and civil activists to jail in Azerbaijan

-Recognizing that the systematic use of criminal justice against recognised and vocal political opponents in Azerbaijan has recently lead to long-term imprisonment of civil society activists Rasul Jafarov, Intigam Aliyev, Leyla Yunus, Arif Yunus and journalist Khadija Ismayilova

-Stressing the fact that the recent sentencing of Faraj Kerimli, Deputy Chair of the Azerbaijani *Musavat* Party (member of LI cooperating Organisation the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party or ALDE Party), to 6.5 years in prison is politically motivated and he has now been formally recognized as a prisoner of conscience by Amnesty International

Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela:

-Regarding the new military tactics law which targets peaceful domestic demonstrations as a direct violation to the right of the Venezuelan citizens to freely express themselves which is clearly enshrined in and protected by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to which the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is a signatory

-Emphasizing that at the heart of every functioning democracy in the society of states lays the right to freedom of speech, including the right of citizens to participate in public demonstrations

-Condemning the on-going political witch-hunt against members of the Venezuelan opposition and civil society including but not limited to the recent imprisonment of Leopoldo Lopez and the on-going legal harassment against the leader of the liberal opposition Maria Corina Machado

Cuba:

-Noting with great concern that the harassment and persecution of any political opposition in Cuba has reached an unprecedented level despite the small steps undertaken by the Cuban government to open the economy and allow for freedom of travel

-Acknowledging that the Cuban government regularly violates freedom of speech and human rights with Cuban citizens far from obtaining real freedom, democracy and private property

-Stressing the fact that almost 3 years after the death of Cuban dissident Oswaldo Paya his suspicious car incident still awaits proper investigation

-Emphasizing on the fact that the responsibility to end oppression lies with the Castro government

Malaysia:

-Stressing the fact that the recent imprisonment of Anwar Ibrahim, Leader of the opposition People's Justice Party (LI member party), poses a violation of international human rights norms and constitutes a mockery of the independence of the Malaysian judicial system

-Recognizing that the case is made even more odious by using for conviction the sodomy laws in the country which take particular aim at the human rights of LGBT communities and should not exist anywhere in the world

People's Republic of China:

-Recognizing that the liberalisation of the economy in the People's Republic of China has led to strong, long-lasting growth lifting millions of Chinese people out of poverty but consistent persecution and prosecution of political dissidents, social activists and religious or ethnic minorities remains as a serious concern

-Regarding the recent sentencing of journalist and dissident Gao Yu for purportedly leaking state secrets as a blatant political persecution in light of the lack of physical evidence and witnesses who can testify as to Yu's alleged state treason

-Expressing great concern that the People's Republic of China now has more journalists in prison than any other country

The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia:

-Regarding the on-going political instability in the country as a potential threat to the stability and security of the wider region

-Expressing concern over the lack of accountability on the part of the government of Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski in light of the recently revealed allegations of indiscriminate wiretappings of members of the opposition, journalists, foreign officials and other prominent members of the community

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia:

-Emphasizing that the recent sentencing of the Saudi liberal blogger Raif Badawi for freely expressing his views on the arbitrary imposition of religion on people in the Kingdom is cruel, degrading and inhumane and violates the Kingdom's international obligations under both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the UN Convention against Torture

-Regarding that the sentencing of Badawi's lawyer, Waleed Abu al-Khair, "for breaking allegiance to the ruler" does not constitute an offence against Islam

-Condemning firmly any form of corporal punishment as an unacceptable and degrading treatment contrary to human dignity

Recalling:

-Its Urgency Resolution on Azerbaijan to 193rd LI Executive Committee meeting in Hong Kong which called on the Azerbaijani government to respect its obligations as Council of Europe member, uphold the values expressed in the UN Human Rights Charter, and end the crackdown on civil society

-Its Written Statement to the 19th Session of UNHRC on human rights defenders in which LI expressed its concern with the growing number of persecutions against human rights defenders around the world

-Its Written and Oral Statements to the 22nd Session of UNHRC on Cuba which called on the international community to demand of the Cuban government to respect the rights of the people to express, affiliate and associate, to immediately release the dozens of political prisoners in Cuba and to stop the arbitrary arrests of peaceful Human Right defenders

-Its World Today Resolution to the 59th Congress in Rotterdam which called for a more liberal, free, competitive, compassionate, equitable and united Malaysia

-Its Written Statement to the 28th Session of UNHRC which called on the Venezuelan government to honour its international obligations and immediately repeal the new military tactics law targeting peaceful domestic demonstrations

-Its appeal letter to the Permanent Representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the United Nations in Geneva, His Excellency Jorge Valero, in which LI called on the Venezuelan authorities to respect their international obligations and protect their citizens' basic rights

Calls:

-On the government of Azerbaijan to honour its obligations as a Council of Europe member and a signatory to International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and immediately put an end to the civil society crackdown and release all prisoners of conscience

-On the government of Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to immediately repeal the proposed new military tactics law and permit for peaceful domestic demonstrations as is expected of any government and restore democracy, rule of law and freedom of expression in the country

-For the inclusion of the discussion on political freedom and respect for human rights in all trade-negotiations with Cuba

-On the international community to establish an independent commission to investigate the death of Oswaldo Paya without further delay

-For a resolution to the political crisis in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia within the framework of the rule of law without impunity

-On the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to halt the corporate punishment against Raif Badawi and secure his immediate release

-On the government of the People's Republic of China and its judicial system to re-examine the case of Gao Yu taking into consideration all factual evidences

-On the United Nations to establish a special procedure mandate focusing specifically on the issue of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience

-On UN Special Mandate Holders to ensure a process of anonymity and impartiality so that victims reporting abuses and human rights violations are not reprimanded and/or prosecuted by the relevant state authorities

-On the UN General Assembly to adopt and implement the proposed "Mandela Rules" which contain a number of practical elements that provide detainees with increased protection from torture and other ill-treatment

Commits:

-For its liberal human rights parliamentarians to continue to work towards giving a voice to the many prisoners of conscience around the world and ensuring that governments which break their international obligations are held to an account

-For its liberal human rights parliamentarians to raise the issue of the growing number of political prisoners around the world directly with the relevant special procedure mandate holders during its annual gathering at the United Nations Human Rights Council on 15 June 2015